

Legends
of the Christ Child

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Legends of the Christ Child

BY

FRANCES MARGARET FOX, 1870-

ILLUSTRATED BY MILDRED ELGIN



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*Lovingly dedicated
to
Mildred Smith
of
Providence, Rhode Island*

Preface

TO THE LITTLE BROTHERS AND SISTERS:—

If ever a copy of this book is yours, please lend it to the grownups in your family; and if they wish to read any of the stories aloud, while you listen politely, please let them do so.

You may tell them that of course the stories are not strictly true, and that I found them in the APOCRYPHAL books, in the Library of Congress, at Washington, with the help of the librarians, Mr. L. H. Herndon, Mr. D. J. H. Cole, and Dr. F. B. Harrison, whom I thank. Also for advice and suggestions, I thank Dr. Edwin E. Willoughby, Chief Bibliographer of the Folger Shakespeare Library, at Washington, D. C.

In the long, long ago, before there were printed books in the world, there were story-tellers everywhere. And about one hundred years after the first Easter, the people of many nations began to wonder about the childhood of Jesus. So the story-tellers asked questions of all who knew anything that might be true about that little Boy and His friends. At last they collected stories that became legends. Many of the legends were put into the APOCRYPHAL books. It was harder for me to learn to say that queer word than it was to write

seventeen of the legends to suit myself; so do not laugh at your big brothers and sisters if they too, stumble over the words APOCRYPHY and APOCRYPHAL.

If you and the grownups in your families are as happy while reading these legends, perhaps on a Christmas Eve, as I have been in finding them in the old books, and doing them over for you, I shall be glad.

—FRANCES MARGARET FOX.

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The Bird That Sang with the Angels

On the night when the little Lord Jesus was born at Bethlehem and laid in the manger, a small, reddish brown bird in a tree near by, was asleep with his head under his wing.

Suddenly the world was filled with light. It was brighter than moonlight, and starlight, and the sunshine at noonday. The little bird awoke and knew not what to think in the strange stillness. For a minute there was no motion, no sound anywhere. Not a leaf stirred, and the tiny bird dared not lift his wings.

Now please remember that the story of the bird is only a legend; but the Bible tells the truth about the radiant beauty of that night, and here are words from the Bible:

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.



And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.

WHEN the angels began to sing, the little bird sang with them. He sang, and sang, and sang for joy. He never had sung a note in all his life

before, for he was a plain little bird, a regular little sleepy head, especially at night; and all he ever had thought about was eating, and sleeping, and taking care of his family.

But when the angels had gone and the shepherds came running to see the little Lord Jesus, the bird in the tree remembered that he had been singing. He was so surprised when he thought about it, that he fell off his perch and landed on the ground in a bed of flowers that had blossomed out when the angels sang.

"Fly, little bird, fly!" the flowers whispered to him. "Follow the shepherds—fly, little bird, fly!"

The little bird did so; and thus it came about that he saw the Baby lying in the manger, and Oh, how he loved Him!

The little bird was so happy that he longed to sing again the angels' song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men."

He flew back to his tree, lifted his head and tried to sing. But he could not sing. He made queer little noises that disturbed the beauty of the night. The little bird tried again and again to sing the praises of the Baby lying in the man-



ger, but he could not sing one note about the joy that filled his heart.

This little bird's home was in Europe, far away, and if only he could sing, he could tell the good news of the birth of the Saviour of the world, as he went flying over the mountains, over the valleys, over the cities,—flying, flying, away and away to his summer home in the North. His heart almost was bursting with joy. He was proud too, because he remembered that he had been singing with the angels. But now, that little bird, while he kept thinking about himself and about his longing to be a wonderful singer, and to be the first to tell the good news in Europe, that little bird could not sing!

Early one evening as he was keeping watch of the manger, he saw Mary, the mother, trying to hush the Baby to sleep. The little One was tossing about on His bed of hay, restless and wide awake.

Straightway, with love in his heart for the beautiful Baby, the bird flew to the edge of the manger and crooned a soft lullaby. Gently he repeated the words his mother used to say when he was cuddled down in his nest with his baby

brother and sister. She couldn't sing either, so she used to say softly, because she so loved her babies,

"Sleep, little ones, sleep.
Hush-a-bye, and sleep."

Soon the precious little Lord Jesus was sleeping, and out into the starlight flew the happy, happy bird. Away and away he flew to the hillside of the shepherds where the angels sang. The bird, thinking only of the sleeping Baby, began telling of the happiness in his heart because he had put the little Lord Jesus to sleep with his soft lullaby talk. The next thing he knew, he was singing and singing for joy.

Soon all the birds of Bethlehem awoke and listened in wonder to the song of the nightingale. For this was the hour when the bird we know as the nightingale, became a singer.

Even to this day, over all Europe in the summer, the nightingale sings gloriously, sometimes in the daytime, sometimes in the night, high, high in the sky, above the listening earth,

"Glory to God in the Highest, And on earth peace, good will toward men."

Legend of the Little Girl and the Christmas Roses

This is one of the oldest of the Christmas legends and has been told in various ways, in different languages.

ONE of the shepherds at Bethlehem who heard the angels sing, was the father of a little girl. She was with him on the hills that night. But she was asleep in the tent when the angels came down to earth where the shepherds were watching their flock. She did not hear the angel of the Lord when he said to the frightened shepherds:

“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

The child stirred in her sleep when the angels sang together, and then, as in a dream, she heard these words:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

The shepherd who was the little girl's father

was sure that his child was sound asleep when he set forth with the other shepherds on the way to Bethlehem. But suddenly the little girl was wide-awake. She sat up and wondered why all the earth was still and why such brightness filled the air. Softly she arose and walked into the night.

Then she saw the shepherds hastening on their way to Bethlehem. Timidly she walked a few steps away from the tent, and wondered why the very stones beneath her feet seemed alive. All the flowers that bloomed on the hillside seemed to be listening, and they bent their lovely heads toward Bethlehem.

Slowly at first the child followed the shepherds. Then she ran, hoping to overtake her father, to put her little hand in his. But the shepherds hastened on their way and the little girl followed them to the manger at Bethlehem, where she saw that they worshiped the Baby born that night.

No one noticed the little girl, as at last she stood at the entrance to the stable and saw the little Lord Jesus lying on the hay in the manger. At first she looked with eyes that were round and bright in wonder. She forgot the shepherds, she forgot her father, as she too, worshiped the beautiful Baby. And Oh, how she loved Him!



Then her eyes filled with tears. She longed to give Him a treasure because she loved Him. She knew that He was the King of Glory, Who had come to earth as a little baby, because He wished to make plain the way to Heaven. Oh, if only she had a gift to show the love in her heart! Her tears fell over her face and fell upon her bare feet.

Then her Guardian Angel stood beside her and said:

“Dry your eyes, little one. You have given the Christ Child your heart. You love Him, and that is enough. But because you love Him, you shall have roses for the King of Glory!”

At that, wherever the feet of the angel had touched the ground, roses followed his footsteps. The plants grew tall, and had no thorns. And roses blossomed, beautiful white roses for the little King.

The child filled her arms with roses, and with radiant face she walked in, carrying the lovely blossoms nodding on their stems. Straight she went to the manger and laid her flowers at the Baby's feet.

He opened His loving eyes wide, and seemed to smile upon the shepherd's little girl as she fell upon her knees before Him.

Straightway her father took her by the hand.
He knew not what to think. Together they walked
out into the joyous night, where white blooming
roses, crowding about their path, filled the air
with wondrous beauty.



A Christmas Gift for a Little Beetle

Somebody on a summer night in the long ago thought up a beetle story to make little children smile. The story was told over and over in lands beyond the blue sea, until it became a legend.

UNDER the roof of the stable where the little Lord Jesus was born, there lived a tiny beetle. He must have had wonderful ears because he heard the angels singing on the faraway hills where shepherds were watching their flocks.

He heard the voice of the angel saying: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

Then, so the story goes, the little beetle heard the multitude of angels saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men."

The little beetle looked down from the roof of the stable and there he saw the Baby lying in the manger. There He was, asleep in the hay.

Straightway the tiny beetle longed to tell all of his friends, the birds, the butterflies, and the animals, about the birth of the wonderful Baby. First though, he wished to see the angels, to be sure that he had the story straight. So away he flew to the hillside where still the glory shone around from the sky. He was just in time to catch the last angel of the multitude of angels, as he was about to leave the earth. Straight he flew to speak with him.

And it pleased the angel to learn that even a tiny beetle was filled with joy because he had heard the glad tidings of the birth of the little Lord Jesus. So, just before he went up and up to enter the open gates of Heaven, the angel took a sparkling jewel from his hair, and placed it on the back of the tiny beetle for a Christmas gift. There it shone with a wondrous light, now here, now there.

And from that minute the little beetle went flying, up and down and around, flashing his light over all Bethlehem. And wherever he found his friends on the earth, in the bushes and on the trees, he told the glad tidings of great joy about the Baby in the manger.



And his friends, the lowly worms, all the insects, and the birds, marveled at the shining, flashing gift the angel had placed upon the beetle's back. They named him, the FIREFLY.

In our country at Christmas time the fireflies are sleeping under the snow. But when we see them flashing their lights in the fields and gardens, on summer evenings, making all the world so lovely, suppose we tell them about the angel who gave flashlights to their family in the long ago at Bethlehem.

Christmas Legend of the Robin's Red Breast

If ever you see a mother robin on her nest at bedtime for baby robins, and if you see her bending her head, this way and that, as she tucks the babies under her feathers, maybe she is getting ready to sing them a soft lullaby; or maybe she is about to tell them a bedtime story.

Anyway, the loveliest robin story ever told is about a long ago robin at Bethlehem. So far as we know, not even the little English robins heard the story, so of course it never has been set to robin music. And if the English robins never heard the story, surely it will be news to our own American robins.

WHEN the little Lord Jesus was born at Bethlehem and laid in the manger, a robin was asleep in an olive tree nearby, with his head tucked under his wing. Suddenly he awoke. At first he thought it was morning because all the world was filled with marvelous light. The golden stars seemed near the earth, and one star, brighter than all the others, was shining down on the stable which sheltered the newborn Baby.

The robin heard angels singing above the hillside where shepherds were watching their flocks. He saw the shepherds when they came running



to worship the Baby that had been born that night and was lying in the manger.

Not long afterward the robin saw Wise Men coming on their camels until they found the Baby. He saw them enter the stable and kneel before the manger, where they offered their gifts. He watched them go home to their own country.

At last when the shepherds were gone, and the wise men, and all the world was still, the robin went gently hopping and flying into the stable. He saw the little Lord Jesus asleep in the hay, and Oh, how he loved Him!

But the fire was burning low and the robin was troubled. He feared that if the fire should go out the little Lord Jesus might be cold. So, while others were sleeping too, the robin hopped close beside the dying fire, and began to fan the coals with his wings.

He forgot that he was a plain little bird, with feathers of dingy brown, and that he never had been called beautiful. He didn't think of himself at all. He thought only of the little Lord Jesus Whom he loved. The fire must be kept burning to keep the Baby warm.

Down went the robin on his knees, and he

fanned, and fanned, and fanned the dying fire with his wings, until the fire blazed up and the flames leaped high.

Then the wonder happened. The radiance from the fire shone upon the robin's breast, and turned the feathers rosy red. And from that shining hour to this, all robins have red breasts.

Now, whether you believe this legend or not, it will do no harm to tell it to mother robins in the lovely month of June.



Legend of the Shepherd with the Feather-Bed

One winter night long ago in northern Europe, when the wind was howling and the snow was falling, it may be that some little children who lived in a castle, wished to sit by the fire long after bedtime. When the bedtime candle was lighted, one little boy may have said,

"I don't want to go to bed!"

In those days when the nights were long and cold, families used to sit by blazing open fires and tell stories while the flames roared up the chimneys, especially at Christmas time. Maybe after his brother had spoken, another little boy said that night so long ago,

"Please tell us one more Christmas story before we go to bed!"

All little boys and girls then living in northern Europe, slept in feather-beds. So the young father, who mayhap had come home to the castle for Christmas after great adventures at Jerusalem, made up this story to tell his little children before he kissed them all goodnight. Anyway, here is the legend that first was told hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

It was a cold, cold night at Bethlehem, when the little Lord Jesus, lying in the manger, was only a few days old. The angels that had come down to earth the night that He was born had gone away. The shepherds that had seen the angels on the



hillside had taken their flocks to the shelter of their folds, because the night was cold.

One of the shepherds, who was sleeping on a feather-bed, dreamed of the little Lord Jesus and the angels. Suddenly he awoke and wondered if the Baby was warm and comfortable lying in the manger on His bed of hay. It troubled him to think that perhaps the Child was cold. After that he could no longer sleep, while thinking that perhaps the little Lord Jesus was cold and shivering with no warm crib for His bed.

"I shall give Him my bed of feathers," said the shepherd.

The sheep and all the little lambs of his flock were sound asleep when he arose and softly placed his sack of feathers over his shoulder. Softly he tiptoed across the courtyard toward the watchman at the gate.

"I go," said he to the watchman, "to give my warm feathers to the little Lord Jesus."

The watchman unlocked the gate. Then, carrying his gift of feathers on his back, the shepherd followed the path that wandered away toward Bethlehem.

Before he had gone far he met a shining angel.

The angel told him that He who was lying in the manger that night needed no feather-bed. The love of the kind shepherd was enough for Him.

Then the angel promised the shepherd that after his days on earth were done and he should be living forever and forever in the bright world beyond the sky, on every Christmas Eve he should scatter the feathers from his own feather-bed, over the earth, and have a merry time. Then the angel was gone.

When the shepherd walked back to the sheep-fold and knocked at the gate, the watchman who opened it wondered why a strange radiance lighted the burden on his back, and why the shepherd's face was shining with unearthly joy; but he asked no questions.

Before many years had passed, the shepherd was gone from earth.

But there are those who tell us that when the snow falls on Christmas Eve, the white flakes are feathers from the shepherd's feather-bed. They do say that the shepherd knows where the flowers are sleeping that need warm blankets of snow to keep them from freezing through the long

night of winter. So, down, down, he scatters joyfully his feathers of snow.

So, goodnight to the little children, when the snow is falling on Christmas Eve. Goodnight, little children, goodnight.



Legend of the Animals on Christmas Eve

One of the loveliest legends told in the old books is about our four-footed friends and the birds on Christmas Eve.

ON CHRISTMAS EVE the world around, something wonderful happens at midnight. At that solemn hour all the animals in the barns, the fields, the plains, and the forests, fall upon their knees; and all the birds sing praises because Jesus was born at Bethlehem, and the angels sang for the shepherds.

Once on a beautiful moonlight Christmas Eve in our own country, a traveler found an Indian creeping through the forest on his hands and knees. The Indian motioned for the traveler to be still. Then in a whisper he said:

“Me watch to see the deer kneel. This is Christmas night, and all the deer fall on their knees to the Great Spirit, and look up.”

Perhaps the famous artists of the olden time were the first to tell the story. They made pictures of the Infant Jesus and His mother in the stable



at Bethlehem, showing the animals, the ox and the ass, on their knees, in adoration of the Child.

Little French children of the long ago were told that after the ox and the ass had knelt before the manger where they had adored the Baby lying on His bed of hay, they walked into the night. But the stars shone so bright, and the air was so filled with mystery, they scarcely dared to step. They heard the wings of angels. At their feet the grass became a wondrous green, and flowers bloomed. The pebbles on the path were shining like jewels. The trees were bowing their heads. The birds sang gloriously. Roosters were crowing, and everything that lived and breathed knew that the King of Heaven had come down to earth to live.

The ox knew that he was a clumsy animal, and outside the stable he feared that he might bump against an angel if he moved about. He was hungry but he dared not eat the grass at his feet, that seemed to be alive and listening; nor had he dared to touch the hay in the stable because it too had come alive, with flowers lifting their bright heads to bow before the little Lord Jesus in the manger.

Softly those two animals, the ox and the ass, went back into the stable, and there on his knees the ox told the beautiful Baby to have no fear of him. He said that he wore his long horns only for looks. He never never had used them to frighten any one. He loved the little Lord Jesus.

But perhaps the most interesting legend of all is told as a play, in which the Rooster, the Raven, the Ox, the Sheep, the Ass, and the Hen, were actors. Others in the play sang in the angel chorus. The rooster speaks first.

The Rooster:—Christ is born.

Raven:—When?

The Crow:—This night!

Ox:—Where, where? (Of course this is not the ox of the stable)

Sheep:—Bethlehem.

Ass:—Let us go.

Hen:—Go there. Go there at once!

While they wait, the angels sing, and the shepherds pass on their way to the stable. When the angel chorus sings, the animals fall upon their knees and look up.

Boys and girls may give this play on Christmas Eve, with little brothers and sisters taking the parts of the birds and animals.

Others may be angels in the chorus, or shepherds.

How beautiful it would be if all the animals in the world should, as the Indian said, "fall upon their knees to the Great Spirit and look up." Anyway, we may do so.

And on Christmas morning, it may be wise to be especially kind to all the animals and birds, and to give them their favorite food and water, as all good children do in Europe, even unto this day.

Legend of the Christmas Spider

Herod was the wicked king who lived in Jerusalem when Jesus was born at Bethlehem, not many miles from his palace. It is true too, that wise men from the East came to Jerusalem and told King Herod that they had come to find and to worship the newborn Child Who should grow up and be King of the Jews, and Who should reign forever and ever.

King Herod told the wise men that when they had found the Child, they must come back to Jerusalem and tell him about it so that he, too, could go and worship Him.

The wise men found the little Lord Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem; but after they had presented the gifts they had brought for Him, instead of going back to see King Herod at Jerusalem, they went home another way.

By this time King Herod had decided that he would not allow the Baby who was born at Bethlehem, to grow up and be King of the Jews. So he planned to kill Him. It is a terribly sad story about all that happened at Bethlehem when the soldiers began their search for the little Lord Jesus.

However, father Joseph was told in a dream to take Jesus and Mary, His mother, and to flee into Egypt. Joseph and Mary did take the little Lord Jesus into Egypt and there they stayed until after the wicked Herod died.

So far the story is true and you may read it in the Bible.

But here is the legend about the good spider that befriended the travelers on their way to Egypt:

BEFORE they had gone many miles from Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary were so tired that they sat

down by the roadside to rest. Mary sang a lullaby to the Baby, and soon the little Lord Jesus was sound asleep in her arms. So His mother leaned back against a tree and fell asleep too. Soon after that father Joseph was sleeping as peacefully as if he were in his home at Nazareth.

He didn't hear Herod's soldiers coming—pounding along—pounding along on the road. But a fly was caring for the family, and from a tree-top he had seen the soldiers. Then down went the fly as fast as his wings would take him, and landed with a buzzing GO-BANG! on Joseph's nose. He couldn't wait to be polite, for there was no time to lose.

Of course Joseph woke up, especially as the fly began buzzing, buzzing in his ear that danger was near! By that time Joseph could hear the shouts of the soldiers coming after the Baby, so he awakened Mary and they followed the fly into a tiny cave close beside the road.

Then the fly saw a spider and straightway told her all he knew about the precious Baby and the wicked Herod.

"What shall we do to save them?" asked the fly.

"I know," answered the spider, "I'll cover the entrance to the cave with cobwebs. Then the soldiers will not look inside the cave. I'll spin, and I'll spin, and I'll make a beautiful web. You must blow dust on it to make it look old."

So she did. She worked as fast as a lace-making machine. She worked and she worked, spinning her beautiful web, up and across, down and around, this way and that way, while the fly scattered dust and made music with his wings, so she would forget that she was tired. He watched too, that he might tell her to hide if he saw the soldiers coming.

Far back inside the tiny cave, the little Lord Jesus, who was sleeping, Mary, His mother, and Joseph who loved Him, were as still, as still as the Christmas stars at bedtime.

The soldiers came thundering to the very entrance to the cave, but they didn't stop. The leader called aloud:

"When you see a dusty unbroken old cobweb like that, it means that no one has entered the cave for a week, so hasten on, my men, hasten on!"

They hastened on, and the Child with His



mother, and father Joseph who loved Him, were saved.

When they had rested, they went happily on their way to Egypt. But before they left, Mary thanked the spider, and Joseph thanked the fly. Then suddenly the shining sun looked down and turned the broken web into shining threads of gold and silver.

Now, whether you believe this legend or not, when you trim your Christmas tree with gold and silver tinsel, you do so in memory of that good spider of long ago.



Legend of the Fun-Loving Olive Tree

Here is a legend that was told in Italy, long ago, and was loved by little Italian children in the olden time.

ONE day when father Joseph, and Mary with the Baby in her arms, were on their way to Egypt, they looked back and saw the soldiers of Herod coming, coming so fast, that they were terribly scared. Even Joseph was frightened because he and his family were out in the open with no possible hiding-place. There wasn't a tent in sight, nor a house, nor a hut, nor even a cave.

"Stop, stop!" shouted the soldiers.

Then Mary saw a friendly looking, gnarled old olive tree.

"Oh, have pity!" she called aloud to the tree.

"Oh, please, please give us a hiding-place. Oh, save my Baby from these wicked men!"

You see, Mary could not forget Joseph's dream. The Bible tells the story in these words:

"And when they were departed,"—the wise

men,—“the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into



Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.”

No wonder Mary cried aloud, “Oh, tree, save my Baby!”

Then answered that kind, polite, and fun-

loving old olive tree, "Walk right in and make yourselves at home! Walk right in, you are welcome!"

At that, the olive tree opened wide, and in went Mary with the Baby, and in went father Joseph. The minute they were inside, the olive tree closed. It wasn't dark inside, because the tree was well lighted with olive-oil lamps.

"Do make yourselves at home," said the tree to its thankful guests.

They did so. Mary and the Baby fell asleep, while Joseph listened to the talk of the soldiers. It was interesting to hear what was happening outside. There wasn't even a crack in the walls of the tree, so Joseph could not watch the soldiers who were tramping around, tramping around, searching for the Baby. Besides, if there had been a crack, the soldiers might have seen light shining through.

The wind was blowing, but the reason why the olive tree shook now and then, was because it was laughing at the angry soldiers. They could not find Mary, and Joseph, and the Baby. One minute they had been so near, they had yelled aloud, "STOP!" The next minute the family had



disappeared. Where were they? What had become of them?

The soldiers rubbed their eyes and wondered. They said bad words, and angrily stamped around, looking everywhere for Mary and the Baby and Joseph. They searched all the afternoon and all night, but they could not find the ones they sought. The laughing wind had blown sand over the footprints of Mary and Joseph, and blew sand in the eyes of Herod's men. When the morning sun came smiling over the hills, the soldiers gave up, and went back to tell Herod that they could not destroy the Child, because He was nowhere to be found.

When it was sure that the soldiers were far on their weary way back to Jerusalem, the fun-loving olive tree opened wide. Then out walked father Joseph, and out walked Mary with the Baby in her arms.

The family thanked the tree for taking them in, and went on their way rejoicing.

And from that day to this, all men have loved the olive tree.



Legend of the Juniper and the Holly Tree

This legend, too, is from Italy, where it was told hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

ONE day Mary with the Baby in her arms, and father Joseph were traveling slowly on the Egypt road, because they were so tired. Suddenly Mary heard more soldiers of Herod coming after them. She turned to speak to father Joseph, but he was far behind her, walking along slowly, slowly, because he was so tired.

“Oh, run, Joseph, run!” she called.

By the time the family were together again in a low thicket of juniper bushes, there was no place where all three could hide from the soldiers. So Mary begged a beautiful green juniper bush to hide her Baby.

The juniper bush did so, quickly. It opened its green branches wide, cuddled the Baby in its strong arms, and then closed its branches tight, tight.

When the soldiers came galloping by, they passed Mary and Joseph without giving them a



second glance. They were hunting for a Baby and there was no Baby in sight.

The Family thanked the juniper bushes, picked up the Baby, and hastened on their way. But soon after that, when they were resting on a rock, other soldiers came along, hunting for the Baby that Herod wished to destroy.

That time the holly tree motioned to Mary and Joseph to come quickly. They did so, and straightway the holly tree spread out its thick branches, all around the Family. The tree hid tall father Joseph and laughed because he was so surprised.

The only tree in sight was that holly tree. But when the soldiers came, they saw no one, although they went poking around and around the place. At last they gave it up, and went galloping away and away.

When it was safe for the Family to travel on to Egypt, Mary bowed to the holly tree and said,
"Always thou shalt remain evergreen."

In these days at Christmas time when we decorate our churches and our homes with branches of the juniper and the holly, let's remember these evergreen legends.

Wheat That Grew Tall in One Night

ANOTHER time when Mary, with the little Lord Jesus in her arms, and father Joseph were hastening on their way to Egypt, a farmer saw them coming. In the old legend he is called a husbandman; but the word means farmer.

When the good farmer saw the Holy Family passing the field where he was sowing wheat, he was distressed. He had heard the story of the birth of our Saviour and about the angels' visit. He knew about the Wise Men from the East who had followed the Star to Bethlehem, and had found the One they sought, lying in a manger.

Also, the farmer knew that the wicked Herod wished to kill the Baby Jesus because the Wise Men had called him "King of the Jews."

The farmer didn't know what to do. He stopped planting the wheat seed and walked into the road. To Joseph he said:

"What answer shall I make when Herod's soldiers ask me if I saw you pass?"

"Tell them the truth," Mary answered. "Tell them that you were planting your field of wheat when we passed by on our way to Egypt."

"Tell them the truth," Joseph agreed.

Sadly the farmer promised that he would tell the truth if Herod's soldiers asked him questions about the little Lord Jesus. But after he had planted the last grain of wheat, he walked home with a heavy heart because he couldn't forget the beautiful Baby. That night he groaned in his sleep.

In the night the wheat began to sprout and to grow. It grew and it grew and it grew.

In the early morning when the farmer looked from his doorway he beheld an astonishing sight. He saw a waving field of ripe wheat where he had planted seed only the day before. There was his wheat, ripe for the harvest.

The farmer ran for his sickle and straightway began the work of cutting the magic wheat. Before the rejoicing sun was high enough in the sky to look over the hills, the farmer heard the soldiers of Herod, pounding, pounding down the road. When they drew near, the captain of the soldiers called aloud to the farmer.

He asked the farmer if a certain Family had



passed that way. The captain described the Family perfectly because he had just come from Bethlehem where he had learned all that he wished to know about the Child sought by Herod.

"Tell me the truth! Have you seen them? Did they pass this way?"

"Yes, captain, yes!" quickly answered the farmer.

"When did they pass? Tell me that!" insisted the captain.

"They passed when I was sowing this field with the wheat seed!"

At the same minute a black beetle that had been upset by the fast growing wheat, angrily chirped,

"Last night! Last night!"

Fortunately the soldiers were talking and shouting so loud they didn't hear the beetle, and they knew that the honest farmer had told the truth.

Straightway the captain gave the order, and the soldiers, now sure that they were too late to capture the little Lord Jesus, turned around and went back to Jerusalem.

II

Legend of the Tall Palm Tree

In many of the legends about the little Lord Jesus, we are told of the trees that bowed before Him, even when He was a Baby, because they knew that He had left His home in Heaven, to live on earth as a little child. One legend is sad because there was a day when the aspen tree would not bow its head with the others in honor of the Heavenly Child. After the aspen saw the Baby's face, he knew that He had come to be the Saviour of men. And that poor tree was so sorry about the mistake he had made, that he trembled in all his leaves. And from that day to this the leaves of the aspen tree always are trembling and shaking.

But the legend about the palm tree in the desert is an old favorite and has been told in almost every land and language.

ONE day Mary with the Baby and father Joseph had been traveling so fast to escape from Herod's soldiers, that they were tired. The sand of the desert was hot under the shining sun, and the way to Egypt was long. So when Mary saw a tall palm tree she said to father Joseph,

"Please let us rest a little under the shade of the tree."

Joseph, who was leading the beast on which she was riding, walked faster until they reached the palm tree. Then he helped her down with



the Baby in her arms. She sat beneath the shade of the tree. When Mary looked up and saw that the tree was filled with fruit, she said to Joseph,

"I wish it were possible to get some of the fruit of this palm."

Joseph smiled, for the fruit was high, high above his reach in the tall, tall tree, and he had no ladder. After a minute though, he shook his head and looked worried as he answered.

"I think more of the scarcity of water, because the skins are now empty, and we have no water wherewith to refresh ourselves and our cattle."

All this time the tree had been looking down upon the lovely Baby in Mary's arm. Now it bowed its proud head, and down and down it bowed the green branches of the tree, until they were lying at Mary's feet. Then Mary and Joseph picked the fruits and were thankful.

Slowly the tree straightened. As it did so, a stream of pure, clear, sparkling water came bubbling from its roots.

The old legend ends with these words: "And when they saw the spring of water, they rejoiced with great joy, and were satisfied themselves and

all their cattle and their beasts. Wherefore they gave thanks to God."

No wonder the happy Family rested under the palm tree all that day and until the next morning, when, fresh and rested, they went on their way rejoicing.

If ever you are out in a storm and see the tall trees bowing their heads before the wild winds of God, why not think about something pleasant; why not remember the legend of the palm tree in the desert, and—smile?

Legend of the Field of Flax

In the long ago only the rich could dress in purple and fine linen because there was not enough flax growing in the world. Linen is made from flax. Now, enough flax is growing in the world so we all may have fine linen. So, let's tell the legend of the field of flax, that made itself into a blue blanket for the Christ Child.

ONE still and lovely morning when Mary with the Baby in her arms, and father Joseph, were far on their way to Egypt, they rested for a few minutes to admire a waving field of flax. The flowers were spread like a blanket of blue over the field and Mary was happy to be near such beauty.

Suddenly a raven came flying over the hills from far away, to warn Mary and Joseph that more soldiers of Herod were coming in search of their Child. This may have been the same raven that was the first bird to hear the song of the angels the night that Jesus was born at Bethlehem. Now he called in alarm to Joseph and Mary and warned them to hide quickly with the Baby.

There was no place near where all could hide from sight, so Mary said to the flax, "Flax, O Flax, hide my Child!"

The lovely blue flowers bent their heads and whispered, "Yes, yes-yes!"

Then down near the brown earth, they parted their strong stems and made a crib where Mary laid her Baby. High above the crib the blossoms were like a blue blanket between the Baby and the sunshine.

Soon the wind began to sing a soft lullaby, and the blue blossoms of the flax rippled over the field like the waves of the sea.

When the soldiers came, the waving, tossing, moving blue blossom blanket that covered the Baby, was so dazzling in the sunshine, that the soldiers winked and blinked, and saw only the flowers that were like the restless sea.

Besides, the playful wind blew dust in their eyes, so they gladly turned around and went galloping back to tell Herod that the Baby had escaped into Egypt.

And while the soldiers, were rubbing their eyes and talking, there was the little Lord Jesus, safe



and happy in His crib of stems, down under His blue blossom blanket.

When all danger was over, Mary gathered the Baby in her arms and said,

“Blessed be thou, O Flax!”

And from that day to this there has been so much flax growing around the wide world, that babies everywhere may have sheets and blankets of fine linen.

A few days later, Mary and the Baby, and father Joseph were safe in the land of Egypt.

Legend of the Christ Child and the Little Kids

After the death of the wicked Herod, Joseph and Mary took the little Lord Jesus to their home at Nazareth and there He lived through His boyhood. Of that time we know nothing that is true about our Saviour as a little boy, except a few words from the Bible telling us that He "grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him." That is all we know to be true.

The great artists of the long ago liked to believe that the Christ Child and Saint John the Baptist used to play together, so they painted beautiful pictures of the two little boys that have been copied so often everywhere around the world. An old writer says:

"The children are seen in art playing together, embracing each other, clinging to the Virgin's knee, gathering flowers, going to school, or running to fetch water from the fountain."

So perhaps it is no wonder that the story-tellers of olden times began to imagine pictures of the Christ Child to be told with words instead of with paint-brushes. These stories have come down to us as legends. Some of them are lovely. One of them is funny. It is about some little kids, and has been told in Europe, Asia, and Africa, for hundreds and hundreds of years, to make little children laugh.

EVERY day when the sun was shining and the birds were singing, the Christ Child, when He was

about seven or eight years old, used to run out to play with other little boys and girls who lived with Him at Nazareth.

One day when He had been playing all the morning with little boy friends, they ran away from Him. First they put their heads together, whispered, laughed, and then away they ran. The Christ Child ran after as fast as He could go, but He couldn't catch one of them.

Suddenly, laughing and shouting, they scooted around a corner of the road, and the Christ Child ran around the corner too. Then He rubbed His eyes and wondered where the boys could be, for not one of them was in sight. They had vanished. He wondered and wondered where they were hiding. Often and often He had played hide-and-seek with them; but this time there was not one boy hiding behind a tree, nor behind the bushes, nor anywhere as usual. There was not a boy to be seen.

While the Christ Child was wondering, He noticed a mother standing in her open doorway, smiling. Other mothers were in the same house where they had met to have a little visit. They stood behind her with their skirts spread wide.

The Christ Child said ever so politely to the mother of the house,

"If you please, do you know where the boys are hiding?"

"Boys," said she, "what boys?"

"All the boys I play with, your little Zebie, and Danny, and Benny too," was His answer. "Do you know where they are hiding?"

Just to tease Him that mother said, "How should I know?"

Just then the Christ Child heard the boys giggling and giggling and He heard them bumping around behind their mothers in the house.

"If you please," said He, "what is the noise I hear?"

"Noise," answered the woman, "why—why the noise you hear is only some little pet kids that often come into our houses."

"Yes," agreed another mother, who was laughing, "there are some three-year-old little kids in here with us!"

At that the little Lord Jesus called aloud, most cheerfully,

"Come out here, O kids, to your shepherd!"

When thus He had spoken an astonishing thing

happened. The little boys who had been hiding in that house for the fun of it turned into so many four-legged pushing little kids. Out they skipped into the road, and the next minute the mother who lived in the house, saw her own little boy with the others, all turned into kids, dancing and prancing around the laughing Christ Child.

The kids kicked up their heels, bunted into one another, chased one another, and had a merry time. But they looked alike, and the poor mothers wept and wailed. They couldn't tell which little kid was Zebie, nor which was Daniny, nor which was Benny, nor who any of them were. The little kids didn't answer when their mothers called their boy names. Then the mothers went down on their knees and said,

"O, little Lord Jesus, son of Mary, have pity upon us and forgive us for teasing you. Now we pray thee, and from thy kindness we ask thee, to give us back our children."

The Christ Child was so sorry for those mothers that He forgave them instantly.

"Come, boys," He said, "let's go and play!"

Straightway those saucy little kids, each step-



ping around on four legs, turned back into the small boys their mothers loved so dearly.

This is the end of the legend, and it may be that whoever made it up for the fun of it, perhaps on a Christmas Eve, it may be that he was the first one who ever called small children, "little kids." Who knows?

Legend of the Christ Child and the Sparrows

Go tell this legend to the sparrows and ask them to sing for joy. Nobody knows who told it first but we are glad that some one who wished to make little children smile, made up a story that begins like this:

ONCE upon a time at Nazareth of the long ago, the Christ Child stood on His doorstep of a Sabbath morning and listened to the birds singing in the sunshine. His thoughts were happy for His heart was filled with love for birds and flowers and everything that lived.

At last He walked down the path, sat beside a little pool by the roadside, and began playing with the soft mud.

"I will make a little bird," said the Christ Child, and He did so.

He rolled and patted and pinched the mud in His small hands, until it looked like a bird. He was so pleased that after He had put down His bird and had patted mud around it to make it stand, that He made another one and called it a

sparrow. You see, this mud really was clay, and easily kept any shape when it became hard.

The Christ Child had made one, two, three, mud birds, when along came some children who were crying. They stopped crying and laughed, when they saw the Christ Child making mud birds.

When one, two, three, four, five, six, birds were finished and standing in a row, two more boys came walking by. They were quarreling; but when they saw the Christ Child making birds of clay, they stopped quarreling and laughed.

By this time the Child was making beautiful clay birds, with perfect heads, and wings, and tails. He was having a good time, and the children who were watching Him were happy too. At last, when there were twelve little clay birds perched in a row, a cross-looking man who was out walking, saw the children standing in a circle around the Christ Child. They stopped laughing when they saw the man.

"What are you doing on the Sabbath Day?" said he, in tones so cross that the living birds stopped singing in the trees and the little clay birds trembled.



The next minute when the man saw the twelve little mud birds in a row, he said to the Christ Child,

“You naughty boy, I shall tell your father that you are breaking the Sabbath!”

He did so, and Joseph came out quickly, and looked sorrowful, because the little Boy he so loved was playing with mud on the Sabbath Day. But when the Christ Child saw Joseph, he smiled, and turning to the toy birds He had made, He said to them,

“Fly, little sparrows, fly away! Fly over all the world, and remember Me!”

Straightway, while the children and Joseph and the cross man were watching, the twelve muddy ones became living sparrows. They turned their heads from side to side, hopped about, chirped a bit, fluttered their tails, lifted their wings, and flew away, and away, into the blue sky.

Even though this story is only a legend, yet we know that our Heavenly Father truly did create all the birds, and that after He became a man, our Lord Jesus did speak lovingly of sparrows. So, if some one reads you this story on a Christmas

Day, why not scatter crumbs outside the window, and call the little English sparrows to dinner? Do this in memory of the One who left His home in Heaven, and became a little Child, that we may live in that bright world with Him, forever and forever.



Legend of the Star Seed at Nazareth

The Bible does not tell us that often an angel came down from Heaven to play with our Lord Jesus when He was a little Boy at Nazareth. Neither does the Bible say that John, who became Saint John the Baptist, ever visited the home where the Christ Child lived. Even so, whoever first made up this legend about the star flowers, must have loved the two children, or he never could have invented such a delightful story. The legend says that a shining angel often did come down to earth to play with the little boy Jesus, and to tell Him about his Heavenly Father and of His home beyond the stars.

ONE time when the angel came flying down from the sky he brought lovely flowers in his arms. That day the angel stayed until it was after bedtime for all little boys at Nazareth, and suddenly the night was dark.

The angel wished for a light to guide him up and up through the long sky-way to Heaven. So he took the flowers that he had brought down from his home, and let them go, one after another, up and up, until, high in the sky they turned into shining stars.

There they were, far above the earth, filling all the air with soft, clear light.



Then, "Goodnight and pleasant dreams," said the angel to the Christ Child. Up and up he went, over the hills, up and up to his home beyond the stars. After that, the angel often brought flowers down from Heaven, that turned into shining stars high in the sky at bedtime.

The old story says that the boy John loved to listen to the little Lord Jesus when He told him about the star flowers carried by the angel.

One day the angel gave the little Lord Jesus a bright, shining seed of the star flowers. And that same day the Christ Child gave the shining seed to the boy John, because He loved him.

When John, with his father and mother, went back to his home over the hills, he planted the seed in his garden; and he told his father and his mother, and all his friends and neighbors, that he had planted the seed of stars. He believed that stars would grow from the seed and go floating away and away up into the sky, and from there they would look down and shine upon the earth.

The seed sprouted and grew in the garden. Up and up from the ground came beautiful green plants. Soon there were buds on the tall stems. But the buds did not turn into stars. When they

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opened they were beautiful flowers shaped like stars. And instead of flying away into the sky at bedtime, the flowers stayed in the garden, to make our earth more lovely when all other flowers were gone.

The children who played with John danced for joy, and named the flowers asters, because they made them think of the stars. Your teacher will tell you that the Greek word for star is *aster*.

And from that day to this, late in the summer, we have asters blooming in our gardens. Anyway, we have enough stars in the sky, and we never can have too many of the lovely asters, giving us their beauty over all the earth.

One Happy Hour at Nazareth

Now this is a legend that mayhap first was told in Arabia to little children who lived in tents and went traveling on the backs of camels.

LONG, long ago, when our Lord Jesus was a little Boy at Nazareth, He was out in the sunshine one lovely morning, running and playing with other children, when one boy said,

“Wait a minute, wait! I have thought of a new game!” This boy’s name was John.

“What is it?” asked Benny.

“The name of the game is WE SALUTE THE KING,” was the answer. “We must choose a king and put a crown on his head. Then we are to stand in his presence and obey him. Always we must bow when we speak to him, and say, We salute the king!”

“Oh, I know,” added Benny, “and let’s make every one who passes by come and say, We salute the king!”

“Who shall be the king?” then said John.

With one voice the children shouted, “Our Jesus is King!”

Straightway the boys took off their little coats and spread them on the ground for the throne. And Jesus sat upon the throne. His face was shining.

"We shall make him a crown of flowers," said a little boy whose name was Mark.

Then all the wild flowers of Nazareth came blossoming around, and lifted their faces toward the King on His throne. The children gathered the wild flowers and asked a little girl whose name was Mary, to make the crown. This she did quickly. Then said John:

"We must march in a procession and Mary shall carry the crown."

"But who shall put the crown on the King's head?" asked wee Samuel.

In a chorus of voices the children shouted, "John shall crown the King!"

So the children marched, and Mary, who carried the crown, led the procession. As they marched, they sang, and the birds sang with them. At last they stood in a circle around the little Lord Jesus on His throne. They bowed and said,

"We salute the King!"

John placed the crown upon His head, and

the little Lord Jesus was King. After that the children gathered flowers, and with their arms filled with blossoms, again they marched around and around, and one by one, they laid the flowers at the feet of the King. Then, bowing low, they shouted,

“We salute the King!”

After that, whoever passed that way was asked to come and bow before the little Lord Jesus, and to say,

“We salute the King!”

Water carriers and camel drivers, and all who traveled with them, shepherds, and all who passed that way, gladly bowed their heads, and said,

“We salute the King!”

The Christ Child was so beautiful sitting on His throne, with a crown of flowers on His head, and with all His flowers around him, that all who saw Him, loved the Child.

Every time the boys and girls called to the passing travelers, “Come hither and adore the King,” they came; and the Christ Child smiled because all Nazareth bowed before Him.

At last, when the sun was high, a big sister whose name was Martha, came running from her house calling,



“Jimmy, Noah, Rachael,—mother says come to dinner!”

Then another big sister made a trumpet of her hands and called from afar off,

“Peter, David, Jonathan,—mother says come—dinner is ready!”

After that a mother called her Anna and Peter to dinner.

Then up rose the King. Said He, “‘Children, obey your parents,’ ” and “‘Honor thy father and thy mother!’ ” And down He stepped, laughing, from His throne, so the little boys could pick up their coats and run home to dinner. He ran home too, and all Nazareth was happy, and the birds sang gloriously.

If ever you play this game with the boys and girls on your street, and your mother sends for you,—you scoot for home too, because truly the Bible says: “Honor thy father and thy mother.”

The Christ Child in the Lions' Cave

We may be sure that when our Lord Jesus was a little Boy, His father and mother read to Him the Bible story of Daniel in the Lions' Den.

Long, long ago, Daniel was living in captivity at Babylon, far from his home land. There, the king, whose name was Darius, loved and honored him. But the king listened to his governors and captains who did not like Daniel. They said, in these words from the Bible:

"Whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions."

In the following verse we read about what happened next:

"Now O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which altereth not.

"Wherefore King Darius signed the writing and the decree.

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

Quickly the enemies of Daniel who had been watching, told the king that Daniel had broken the law; he still was saying prayers to his God; he must be thrown to the lions.

King Darius was heartbroken. He had forgotten about Daniel when he signed the writing. Now he knew not what

to do to save his friend. It is no wonder that he could not sleep the night that Daniel was tossed into the lions' den.

The Bible says: "Then the king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions.

"And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spoke and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

"Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live forever.

"My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me."

THIS story is true, and also it is true that there were lions in Palestine when the little Lord Jesus lived at Nazareth.

But we are not told in the Bible that the Child Jesus ever went traveling with His father and mother far away from home over the rough and rocky road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The old time story-tellers, though, didn't bother any more about geography than they did about facts. So, in the old legend it is said that when the Christ Child was eight years old, He was on a journey with His family and other fathers and mothers and children, on the Jericho road.

On that road there was a cave where the lions lived. Frightful stories were told about those lions, and travelers were afraid to pass that way. At this

time, one old lioness in the cave had some new-born babies to take care of, and she was dangerous. She roared terribly.

All the children except the Christ Child were scared by the roaring of the lions and the talk they heard about them. The fathers said that some way must be found to get rid of them, with bows and arrows, or spears. The lions must be killed. Some of the little boys began shooting pebbles with sling-shots and bragged about what they would do if the lions came after them.

Soon the Boy Jesus began to feel troubled about those unhappy lions. He knew that they were unhappy because all men wished to kill them and no one spoke kindly even of the mother with her family of little ones. The lions needed food and water, yet always they were in danger when they walked from the cave in search of something to eat and water to drink.

At last the Christ Child felt so sorry for those innocent lions that He walked into the cave to let them know that they had one friend. He told them that they were living in the wrong place for lions. There was no fear in His heart as He faced them.

The children He had been talking with, and all who were near by, trembled at the sight. They were so horrified that they could not move nor speak. They were sure that they never again would see the little Boy that every one loved. They knew that the lions would kill Him, but no one dared go near the cave. Children cried, and Mary and Joseph stood afar off with their heads bowed.

To use the very words of the legend: "And when the lions saw Jesus they ran to meet Him and adored Him. And Jesus was sitting in the cavern, and the lions' cubs ran hither and thither round His feet, fawning upon Him, and sporting. And the older lions with their heads bowed down, stood at a distance, and adored Him, and fawned upon Him with their tails."

A few minutes later, out from the cave walked the Child Jesus and the lions. Out they all came. The baby lions were playing around His feet and the old lions were wagging their tails as they walked.

Those who were watching knew not what to think. Only Joseph and Mary were not surprised.

Down to the River Jordan the Child walked with the lions, and pointed out to them the desert



on the other side where they could dwell in safety. The old legend says:

“After these things Jesus crossed the Jordan in the sight of all, with the lions: and the water of Jordan was divided on the right hand and on the left. Then He said to the lions in the hearing of all, ‘Go in peace, and hurt no one.’”

The lions wagged their tails, bowed their heads and spoke gently to the Child in their own language, and went away. The Child returned to His mother.



WORDS THAT ARE TRUE

You will find the true story about the childhood of the Boy Jesus, in the GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE, at the end of Chapter Two.

And remember always that Jesus loved little children. After He grew up, and not long before His life on earth was finished, He said:

“Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

THE END

